

Volunteers create safe place for kids

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SAN DIEGO – Work began yesterday on a playground in Emerald Hills. And – talk about efficiency – work ended yesterday on a playground in Emerald Hills.

More than 250 volunteers completed the project in less than a full work day.

It'll be ready for action today – after the concrete settles.

"Kids need a safe place to play," said Abdi Ahmed, 18, a nearby resident who volunteered to help build the playground.

OVERVIEW

Background: The project is part of a statewide effort to build 10 play spaces, launched March 24 by California first lady Maria Shriver.

What's happening: Eight of the projects throughout the state were built yesterday in honor of César Chávez Day.

Ahmed hauled mulch.

For hours.

For the children, he said.

The playground is one of eight built throughout the state yesterday in honor of César Chávez Day. Two others were built earlier. Murals honoring the late civil rights leader were painted at each of the sites.

Gaby Beas – who works for the San Diego County Migrant Education program – took part to honor Chávez. She brought along some students.

They were mixing concrete. No, Beas had never mixed concrete before.

"It's fun," she said, and she actually seemed to mean it.

Private industry might want to take notes. People hustled. And smiled. It was a happy, productive, energetic work force.

A miracle.

KaBOOM!, a nonprofit that builds playgrounds throughout the nation, was one of the forces behind the effort. And it has the job down to a science.

Before construction, neighborhood children give suggestions for the design. Then, parts are ordered and shipped to the site a few days before the big day.

On the big day, kaboom: A playground is born.

“Today, we build everything,” said Nora Donaldson, the project manager for this particular playground.

Even in the morning, the playground, at Bayview Heights Place, was beginning to come to life. A big purple slide was on its back, soon to be righted.

Other pieces were here and there, ready to be put in place. It looked like a puzzle taking shape.

Volunteers from Volunteer San Diego and the MACC Project, a local social-services agency, participated in the construction. CaliforniaVolunteers, a state agency, gave the \$85,000 funding.

And Robert Harper gave up his Saturday.

Harper was painting the basketball court. No, he had never painted a basketball court before, said Harper, who is the information technology director for the MAAC Project.

“It’s not as easy as I thought,” he said.